

A WITLESS QUEST.

Across the high-road, down the dell,
Full of gay and merry folk,
In those old days when earth was young,
And kith and kin were all at hand,
All maidens were, the prince's maid,
A humble heart I felt would wed;
An old man or a young man,
I'll wed the maid who's true,
The fresh wind to his chestnut curls,
His crimson cloak was sewn with pearls.

At last! each maiden, fair or plain,
Was yet a woman—therefore rare,
The prince rode on his white steed,
Till none but not old Father Time,
Who leaped upon his scythe and smiled:
A witless quest is this, my child!
Yet will I give to you and thy sweet
Eternal youth. I won't indeed
Thou' it need it for I row, 'quoth he,
Thou' it ride full long and truly.

Still fares he on. He scans them all—
The princess throne in palace hall,
The peasant girls in wooden shoes,
Hapt vestals kneeling in their pews;
But he is fair or he is plain,
Is a woman—therefore rare!
And should'st thou, gentle reader, chance
To see thro' forest trees a distance
The gleaming of a chestnut curl,
Or in thy path a pensive pearl—
Upon thy beads I pray thee,
A prayer for poor Prince Florimel!

—Florence May Ait, in Judge.

A HARMLESS LADY.

Why Mrs. Whitcomb Followed Her Husband to the Country.

The line of rail fence that divided the two farms stretched far down the grass-green meadows, ending at right angles with the more pretentious fence along the country road. From the two corners thus defined, the land spread out in even broadening borders, and upon each side of the dividing line embraced a distant farmhouse in its long sunny arms. In their soft colors of green and white, the two houses lay like idle creatures sprawling in the sun.

The meadows glistened under the floating light of an early summer morning, and Farmer Basset, at the foot of his fertile undulating field, stopped now and then, with hammer in hand, to direct a long gaze of satisfaction over his thriving estate. He was knee-deep in long grass, and under his great straw hat was sheltered alike from the sun's rays and from ordinary vision. But the outlook from under its broad brim brought a flood of pleasure to the owner's heart, for he was looking on the side of the clean smooth floor of earth between the wavy stems of wheat, and, in contrast to it, the weed-entangled growth upon the adjoining land.

"Jinkerton!" suddenly exclaimed the farmer, with a surprised stare over the fence. "Has Whitcomb come back?" Two men could be seen across the intervening field, walking slowly about the house. One was bent and was leaning upon the arm of the other.

"That's Whitcomb or it's his double," he ejaculated again. "I wonder what it means! The house is all closed."

With a sudden vigor he drove the long nail home into the thick wood, and, giving it another sharp decisive blow, dropped his hatchet into the basket and started in the direction of his house.

Mrs. Basset had made the same observation from the kitchen window, and met him at the door in all the elation of discovery.

"He must have come late yesterday evening, and he has taken the back room upstairs."

"I'd like to see the old fellow. If I thought he'd be friends, I'd go over. But he left here in such a mighty row, and has never been back since—perhaps it's better to let him follow his lie."

"He's married, isn't he? I wonder if his wife came with him."

Basset pushed the damp hat rim back from his matted hair and looked at her from his gentle blue eyes.

"I'd hate to be offish with him—about old times, too. He looked kind of sick, didn't he? A man seemed to be helping him around the yard."

He went about his work all that day in a disturbed meditation, glancing toward his neighbor's house, which still wore the uncommunicative aspect of long disuse. Later, as he was returning from the orchard, he set down his basket of apples and stood with his eyes fixed thoughtfully upon one of the windows, whose blinds had been partially opened and through which he might draw some knowledge of the silent interior; it was like an eye, drowsy and half closed, but full of a subtle intelligence.

"Is this other woman nice looking?" "Every one seems to think her a good looking woman. Mr. Whitcomb used to think so," and Mrs. Basset's iron slid smoothly over a shining napkin.

The disturbed wife was fast losing a calm view of the situation. She rose and sauntered to a glass hanging against the wall, saying with an hysterical laugh:

"He married me because I was pretty. But I'm positively getting wrinkled now, and Henry can't endure wrinkles. She looked in with a frown at the pucker forehead reflected in the glass. To herself, she was saying: 'To go back home and leave him here with her, and not knowing what she is like—I can't do it! Silly unreasonable child that I am!'"

"She is married now," suggested Mrs. Basset.

"Oh, yes, I suppose so. All attractive women get married. Women in the country follow the fashions a great deal nowadays, don't they? I mean, if they are clever enough. I suppose they copy the pictures they see, and follow the directions of the magazines."

"This woman takes a magazine; I have often seen it," interposed Mrs. Basset.

"Oh, does she?" exclaimed the troubled little woman. "Now, then, do you know if she wears bell skirts or circular skirts? She bent over upon the edge of the ironing-board, her chin in her hand, while her clouded gaze followed now the gliding iron and was now raised to the face of the farmer's wife. 'Maybe she wears the umbrella skirt; I always detest it. An umbrella skirt never was anything but ugly. I'd hate to think of the successful thing dangling around me. Does she call it that?'"

She asked, anxiously. "They are cut like this," and with her slender fingers she drew an imaginary figure suggestive of a cone in shape, cutting out its apex carefully. "It works like a charm, is plain and smooth at the waist, but the bottom is perfectly beautiful—is very full and stands away out like this. A genius made that pattern! Does she wear that kind of a skirt?"

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stamp that set her ruffles fluttering from shoulder to toe, like the rustle of a tree and its innu merable leaves.

"I suppose I must put on the ugly mask of deception and smile and smile and be a villain, for I'm not a bit frightened about him. If he could only be in alarming danger without its being serious! I believe it would be easier then; but he can't, and what shall I do?"

"A few minutes' agitated rustling up and down the room, she resumed: 'I don't mind her being pretty; lots of country girls are that and are perfect failures, for they are likely to be simple too. But if she's smart enough to have style about her, I think I shall get distracted. Henry is always perfectly infatuated with her! That solves the worst part of it; to be stylish, one must be very sharp and clever, and to have an air about one takes a clear head and artful scheming. Oh, I'll be scared to death if she's a stylish woman!'"

When Mrs. Basset and her husband entered the house, a cordial welcome was given her and a room prepared for her upstairs. But her field of operations laid below, amid the informalities of household custom. In conversation, she skirted along the channel of her thoughts and talked in ambush of the subject that engrossed and tormented her.

"Mr. Whitcomb was born in that very house, wasn't he?" she inquired, by way of challenging remark.

"Oh, yes; he was born and raised in this part of the country." And as Mrs. Basset moved over to the kitchen stove with the iron in her hand, the floor shook under her heavy tread. Mrs. Whitcomb glanced involuntarily down at her own light, trimly clad foot and then said:

"I suppose you knew him, didn't you? Maybe you were together at quiltings or singing school, or wherever it is the young people go for amusement."

"Oh, yes," replied Mrs. Basset, smiling broadly. "My husband and I knew him well. We always called him Little White, because he was somewhat slight and never stout like the other boys."

"Have heard them say he was quite a favorite with the girls out here—has always been graceful and had a taking way with him—and that in fact, when he was quite young, he fell desperately in love with one of them," said Mrs. Whitcomb, in a careless manner.

"They try to tease me about that now. That beautiful girl is this! and she leaned over admiringly to a coarse crocheted netting fastened to the back of a chair. Then throwing herself lightly back again she added: 'I suppose you can tell quite a story about it?'"

"About the time?" echoed Mrs. Basset, in pleased surprise. "Oh, yes; how could you guess? When I was just twelve years old I had four grandmothers—living—two great ones you know—and they all knit that for me. I think all the world of it; everyone regards it as a great curiosity."

Mrs. Whitcomb was disappointed at this result—albeit she was momentarily startled at the remarkable incident which resolved not to make a second mistake.

"Indeed! It is certainly wonderful. I'm surprised that you use it about the house. But your having no children makes many things possible. Mr. Basset is such a strong man! I envy him when I think of my husband, Henry. He will have to stay here several weeks perhaps, and how I'm to go back home without him is hard to tell. But he will meet some of his old friends again when he is stronger. That girl he especially liked—she is here, is she?"

She asked, complacently, gathering in with thumb and finger the ruffle that fell about her wrist.

"The girl? Oh, yes, she's here," responded Mrs. Basset.

"I suppose she is a woman now?" "Yes, she's a woman now, of course."

"I wonder if I couldn't see her sometime. I have a great curiosity about her. Oh, who is that?" and she sprang to the window.

"What a fine rider she is, and how she looks splendid on horseback! That isn't a country girl is it? She isn't that woman, is she?"

She started painfully and fixed her eyes upon Mrs. Basset's imperturbable face.

"Oh, no, that isn't the woman. But she's from this neighborhood, though. She's one of the Brockville girls; they all ride."

"She's very fashionably dressed; she looks as if she came from the city," mused Mrs. Whitcomb. Then she blushed a little and entered the battle bravely.

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"Some of her skirts are tolerable wide. She's considered a very well-dressed woman among her friends."

"Does she have puffs on her sleeves or her shoulders, and big ruffles, the kind that stand out and give a woman such a magnificent air? Oh! I've seen ladies that looked positively sublime in their big silky sleeves, and, when the dresses are light, covered with lovely lace; and you see them gliding around in a room full of people—oh! they look—she pauses with a long convulsive sigh, "they look like floating angels!"

There was a silence of profound absorption for a moment, when she resumed:

"Maybe she stuffs her sleeves with cotton wadding. Does she? That gives a striking effect."

Mrs. Basset's fund of information was not extensive, and her questioner was in despair when she only maintained, stolidly:

"Yes, she is, no doubt, considered to be a smartly-dressed woman."

"I wonder, now, if she ever wore a Derby collar? Has she gloves and shoes to match her dresses or to give a harmonious contrast?"

Mrs. Basset had nothing further to say, and, piling up the handkerchiefs, went from the room, vouchsafing no grain of comfort.

The day after they had seen the doctor drive away from the Whitcomb home, Farmer Basset said:

"I can't stand this way of doing any longer. If Whitcomb doesn't like it, I can walk back again across lots; but I'm going over. It looks inhuman to have an old neighbor back home again and never go near him."

Mrs. Whitcomb, leaning of his decision, and, with loosely flowing skirt caught up in one hand and shading her eyes from the sun with the other, she tripped over the path that had long been lost in over-growing grasses, through which the farmer had made his way only a few minutes before.

She crossed a wide porch at the back of the house, ascended a flight of narrow uncarpeted stairs, and advanced on tip-toe down the hall toward a room from which she heard sounds as of some one moving. She placed her open palm lightly against the door, which was slightly ajar and stood listening. Farmer Basset's deep tones were saying:

"Don't you know who I am? You haven't forgotten that Jo Basset lives in this neighborhood, have you?"

Mrs. Whitcomb pushed the door ever so little and looked in. Her heart swelled up within her.

"Oh, my poor dear husband, how thin he looks, with that shade over his eyes! If it wasn't for that horrid woman, I'd go back home where I belong."

The accusing tears were streaming down her face as she looked at the two men in the darkened room.

Farmer Basset had put his hand upon the sick man's chair, and the latter, with its lowered head, with both his white ones; his eyes were bandaged from the light.

"You, old Jo Basset?" he said, eagerly. "This is good of you. A farmer learns never to lose a minute's sunshine, and yet you come into this dark hole! You're a splendid fellow, Jo!"

"I'm powerfully glad to see you. You don't look bad, you know—just a little rest is all you need," and Basset proceeded to shake his friend's hand heartily. "You've forgotten our quarrel, haven't you?"

"Our quarrel?" said the other, wonderingly. "What quarrel, Jo? You don't mean any of those trifles we were always having? I don't seem to remember," and he turned his unseeing face upward inquiringly.

"Oh, you've forgotten it! Now, I tell you I'm mighty glad of that. I might have known it, seeing that you are married yourself. About my wife—don't you remember, old fellow?"

"Your wife?" responded the other, and then a beaming smile broke forth upon his face. "Clara? Of course, I remember now. She was a fine girl, and it did hurt me, spring chicken that I was, when you got in ahead of me there. Forgotten it, and his laugh rang merrily in spite of his weakness. "Well, I should say I have you ought to see Mrs. Whitcomb! I would have her here now, but the doctor insists on rest for me, and says I'm in a perpetual delirium when Mrs. Whitcomb is by. It's hard medicine—worse than any in his bottles. Do you wonder I didn't remember our old quarrel? It's fun, though! I'm glad you reminded me of it."

Farmer Basset rubbed his hands in glee; nothing could have delighted him more than seeing his friend in such spirits.

Mrs. Whitcomb stood without the door, the very tears stopped upon her face in the consternation of the moment. Mrs. Basset, with her straw hat shaped like a bent scoop-shovel and its dejected trimming, her round blouse with its buttons down the front, the skirt with its bunch of fullness around the waist, the dull thick shoes—this was the vision that rose in her mind. This was the woman over whom she had been grieving with trembling lips and downcast head! She made her way down the stairs, out into the open air, and there held council with her own follies and humiliation.

The next day she sat in the farmer's wagon, under the shade of his big, black umbrella, with her own silk one by her side in its newest cover, and behind them were water trunks. Mrs. Basset stood in the doorway, seeing them start.

"Yes, Henry will be all right, with you to watch him now and then," she said, cheerfully, from her high seat. "I shall be perfectly satisfied. Let me know, of course, if he should get worse again, and the doctor says he won't. You've been very kind to me, let me say again, and good-by!"

She was driven off with a heart freed of its burden and as light as the step of the fleet-footed horses, silently blessing the harmlessness of an unfashionable woman—Anna Embree, in Arthur's Home Magazine.

A Boston Woman Saw the Fair.

There is a woman in Boston who went to the world's fair when she was too ill to see her friends. Her heart was so much set upon going that it seemed a question whether staying at home would not threaten her life more than going. At all events she went, attended by her sister, who is a physician, her brother and a nurse. They took her to a hotel close to the gates and rolled her about five mornings in a reclining chair. And if their friends found it so, they were very kind to me, let me say again, and good-by!"

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BY THE SHEARS.

NINETY-ONE per cent. of the farmers in Utah own their farms.